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17 APRIL 1972

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SOUTH VIETNAM: Heavy fighting was reported in the major battlefronts over the weekend, and there was also a sharp step-up in Communist attacks along the northern and central coasts.

Government troops lost a fire support base in Kontum that had been under severe pressure for several days, and a district headquarters in coastal Binh Dinh Province was overrun. Reinforcements reached the besieged provincial capital of An Loc north of Saigon, however, and helped fend off repeated tank and infantry attacks by the North Vietnamese. At last report, the South Vietnamese still hold most of the city and the morale of the defenders was taking a turn for the better.

The South Vietnamese also seemed to be gaining a somewhat better grip on the situation in Quang Tri. Saigon's 3rd Division, which took substantial losses along the DMZ in the opening days of the offensive, has begun some limited counterattacks against the enemy west and north of Quang Tri city. In the Hue area, North Vietnamese forces maintained pressure against South Vietnamese troops at Fire Support Base Bastogne over the weekend, again preventing resupply of the base.

The enemy carried out damaging rocket and mortar attacks against Da Nang and several other coastal towns and bases as far south as Khanh Hoa Province. Local Viet Cong forces appeared to be playing a more important role in the offensive. Viet Cong local forces are credited with the destruction of the district capital in Binh Dinh, and they inflicted serious losses on government regional forces in other clashes in that province.

25X1X sources point to continued heavy fighting in many areas in the days ahead.)

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(Meanwhile, President Thieu is strongly emphasizing his personal role as commander in chief of the armed forces in the current military crisis. The government has also begun an ambitious campaign aimed at stiffening both popular and government resolve. In the last several days Thieu has visited scenes of major action north of Saigon and in Kontum Province. Unlike his earlier visit to the Quang Tri front early this month, the latest trips have been given a great deal of play in the semi-official press. (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM))

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(C) VIETNAM-USSR-CHINA: Moscow's and Peking's response to the air strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong has thus far been measured, and in both cases seems designed to avoid unsettling relations with the United States.

Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Kovalev presented a demarche to Ambassador Beam late yesterday which focused solely on the damage done to four Soviet vessels at Haiphong. The protest did not indicate any injury to Soviet personnel, although it stated that there were dead and wounded among the workers of the port who were carrying out loading operations on the Soviet ships. The demarche called the air strikes "gangster activities" that violated international law and freedom of shipping, and insisted that the US take measures to prevent "similar provocations" in the future. The choice of a deputy foreign minister to deliver the protest and the demarche's concentration on the damage to Soviet vessels (not to the DRV) seem intended by Moscow to play down the implication of the air strikes on US-Soviet relations.

At roughly the same time Kovalev was presenting the protest, TASS issued a statement saying that "leading circles" in the Soviet Union "closely follow" the situation in Vietnam and that the "Soviet people" condemn the air strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong. The statement makes no mention of the damage to Soviet ships and no connection between the air strikes and US-Soviet relations. It does, however, contain a cryptic warning that US actions complicate the international situation as a whole. Like Brezhnev's publicized remarks to senior North Vietnamese diplomats in Moscow last Wednesday, the TASS statement also avoids any open-ended pledges of Soviet assistance to Hanoi. It merely states that the USSR fulfills its internationalist duties by giving "necessary aid and support" to all patriots of Indochina.)

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(In its initial reaction to the air strikes, North Vietnam has emphasized the scope and intensity of the raids. Hanoi news media have already distributed photographs that allegedly depict damage to civilian areas of Hanoi and Haiphong. In what appears to be an effort by Hanoi to emphasize the Soviet aspect of the air strikes, the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris distributed a news release asserting that the raids near Haiphong had damaged a Soviet merchant ship and injured one of its crew.

Also from Paris yesterday, Xuan Thuy said that the Communists would "reconsider" the question of resuming the talks. This is the closest the Vietnamese Communists have ever come to a threat to break off the talks.

Peking's reaction thus far has been generally restrained and appears to reflect the importance the Chinese attach to their relations with the United States. Regular Peking broadcasts have all but ignored the air strikes. The only authoritative comment is contained in an NCNA account of Premier Chou's meeting with a representative of the PRG yesterday evening, occasioned by a personal presentation of the NFL/PRG appeal of 15 April to Chou. The premier's remarks as reported by NCNA are little more than a compendium of clichés used by the Chinese over the past year to describe the Indochinese war, heavily interlarded with quotations from the appeal itself. Chou expressed standard Chinese optimism with respect to the eventual outcome of the fighting and mentioned the bombing of Haiphong and Hanoi only in passing and without suggesting that it posed a threat to China or Chinese interests. The premier claimed that the raids show that Washington had embarked again on the "old track of escalation," and that if it really wanted to solve the Vietnam question it must seriously consider and "actively respond" to the PRG's seven-point proposal. The NCNA account makes no mention of Chinese assistance, of President Nixon, or of damage to Soviet ships. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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URUGUAY: Congress has granted President Bordaberry's request for the temporary suspension of individual rights and the declaration of a limited "state of internal war."

In asking the Congress for the powers, Bordaberry affirmed that the Tupamaros themselves had declared war on the government and that it would be a tremendous error for the authorities not to make an effective response. The legislators of the president's Colorado Party and of the principal opposition Blanco Party supported his request; the members of the leftist Frente Amplio coalition opposed it. The Congress did limit the term of the measures to 30 days rather than the 90 requested by the president and restricted the declaration of the "state of internal war" to the zone affected by terrorism--principally the Montevideo area. The most important emergency measures give the military the main responsibility in the fight against the terrorists and authorize the extended detention of suspects without trial.

At least 12 terrorists reportedly have been killed and several other important ones captured, in response to the murders of two policemen, a naval officer, and a former government official by subversives on 14 April. The searches are continuing.

In an apparent attempt to blunt the administration's drive against them, the Tupamaros have distributed to legislators and the press a purported "confession" by a policeman whom they kidnaped on 24 February. The document alleges that several government officials--including three of the four murdered men--are involved in extra-legal antiterrorist groups. Frente Amplio congressmen used the document in their arguments against granting the emergency powers.

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[These legislators announced later that they intend to accuse the administration in Congress of being responsible for a series of bombings that damaged a Frente Amplio office and homes of party members yesterday, after the passage of the special powers.] (SECRET NO FOREIGN DISSEM)

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ROMANIA-ZAMBIA: As part of an effort to increase the Romanian presence in the third world, Bucharest has granted a \$50-million credit to Zambia.

A joint economic commission was set up during President Ceausescu's visit to Lusaka last month to find ways by which Romania could assist Zambia in mining, machine building, and agricultural production. The credit is to be used for the purchase of industrial plants and equipment, and for licenses to produce industrial goods. Romania will also provide technical assistance and training.

Zambia, already close to Yugoslavia and a beneficiary of aid from Peking, has broadened its foreign aid base by these arrangements with the maverick Romanians. Ceausescu, for his part, is interested in increasing Romania's presence in Africa as a means of underscoring his "principled, independent" foreign policy. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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ST. VINCENT: The appointment of James Mitchell as prime minister has resolved the island state's parliamentary deadlock. Mitchell left Prime Minister Milton Cato's Labor Party government in February and ran as an independent in the recent elections for the 13-seat House of Assembly. The elections produced a six-six split between Cato's party and the opposition People's Political Party headed by Ebenezer Joshua, with Mitchell holding the decisive 13th seat. Six of the new Assembly delegates from Joshua's party have now agreed to form a government headed by Mitchell, after a week of rising tension on the island. This should ease the threat of civil disturbances, but in the long run Mitchell's moderate and independent philosophy could clash with Joshua's more radical attitudes and require new parliamentary elections. (CONFIDENTIAL)

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